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ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the degree of uniformity that exists between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher, and between each of those and the student teacher, as each of the three pairs evaluates the student's performance according to common criteria. Participants in the study were 81 student teachers, their cooperating teachers, and the 15 university supervisors working with the students and their cooperating teachers. A list of 24 problem areas most commonly mentioned by new teachers were arranged as Likert-type items in a questionnaire. Respondents indicated the degree of difficulty which the student teacher had experienced with each item. Responses were analyzed to determine whether one observer's variations from item to item tended to parallel the second observer's variations. A ranking of the mean responses from each group for each item suggested that the three parties were in agreement about those areas which had posed the greatest difficulty for the student teacher. However, cooperating teachers and university supervisors provided disparate judgements of a student teacher's performance. It is suggested that the cooperating teacher may be operating in the pragmatic mode and the university supervisor in a theoretical mode, and the student teacher, drawn by the demands of each, somewhere between. As a consequence, correlation figures tend to be low in performance evaluation. (JD)

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Do University Supervisors, Cooperating Teachers and Student Teachers Agree About the Student Teacher's Performance?

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Abstract

Educational research consistently suggests that student teaching is very important to the development of new teachers. As important as the experience is, however, correlation analyses of observation data suggest the presence of a fundamental conflict in student teaching between the theoretical orientation of universities and the much more pragmatic orientation of classroom teachers. This conflict may limit the facillitative effect which the experience can have.

Teacher preparation programs uniformly provide for the careful supervision of students engaged in field activities. It has become common, particularly in student teaching situations, to involve both a cooperating teacher and a university supervisor with the student. Including personnel from both the school site and higher education in the student teaching experience is supposed to reflect an important blending of theoretical and practical considerations in teacher preparation. Although they represent different institutions, the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher are looking for skill in essentially the same instruction and management areas, and the assumption is that their separate evaluations of students progress will be compatible.

In the absence of compatibility between university supervisor and cooperating teacher, needed remediation would be inordinately difficult. The effective development of the student also depends, in some measure, on the compatibility of supervisory evaluations with the student's own self-evaluation. This study was conducted to establish the degree of uniformity that exists between the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher, and between each of those and the student teacher, as each of the three pairs evaluates the student according to common criteria.

Method

Teaching problem areas have been reported with reasonable

stability in the research literature, particularly those problems encountered by the new teacher. Furthermore, the areas of difficulty are common for teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels (Veenman, 1984).

Veenman's survey (1984) yielded a list of problem areas ranked in terms of the frequency they are mentioned by new teachers. Data for the present study were gathered via an instrument based on that research. The 24 items most commonly mentioned (see Appendix) were each arranged as Likert-type items in a questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of difficulty which the student teacher had experienced with each item by selecting one of five possible choices for each. A "1" indicated that the item "has not been a problem." A "2" indicated that "the problem rarely occurs." A "3" indicated "occasional difficulty." A "4" suggested that "a problem often occurs." A "5" suggested "a serious problem."

The instrument was administered to 81 student teachers, their 81 cooperating teachers, and the 15 university supervisors working with the students and their cooperating teachers. The university supervisors were all formerly classroom teachers. Many of them were former colleagues of the cooperating teachers participating in this study. All respondents were associated with a public university in the southwest. Data were gathered during the final four-week portion of a sixteen-week student teaching experience.

The item responses were tabulated by group (students, cooperating teachers, or supervisors) and ranked by mean response.

Correlation analyses were performed for each pair of groups on items with the highest mean responses.

The correlation coefficient provides a measure of concomitant variation (Kerlinger, 1973). In this study the correlation coefficient suggests not whether pairs of respondents indicated the same degree of difficulty with a particular item, but whether one observer's variations from item to item tended to parallel the second observer's variations. Such an analysis suggests the degree to which two observers share a common perspective of the student teacher's performance on all items.

There were just 15 university personnel involved, each of whom had several students to supervise. To accomodate any possible problems associated with a lack of normality in groups this small, the Spearman's Rho correlation statistic was computed and is reported with the more commonly used Pearson's Product Moment statistic.

Results

A ranking of the mean responses from each group for each item suggested that the three parties were in agreement about those areas which had posed greatest difficulty for the student teacher. The ten variables with the highest mean responses from each group of respondents are presented in Table 1. Besides being basically very similar, the rankings are also consistent with Veenman's (1984) findings.

-place Table 1 about here-

A more complete picture of the questionnaire data is provided by correlation results presented in Table 2. The five items with highest mean responses across all groups were (1) classroom discipline, (2) motivating students, (3) dealing with the problems of individual students, (4) dealing with slow learners, and (5) dealing with individual differences.

Of the five items thought most troublesome for the student teacher, only in the instance of one item, dealing with individual differences, did a correlation coefficient reach the level of .40. In fact, the average Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the five most troublesome items was .22. The average nonparametric correlation was .20. This suggests that although there was general agreement about which items were causing the student teacher difficulty, there were substantial differences in the perception of how troublesome particular items were for the student teacher as respondents moved from item to item on the questionnaire.

-place Table 2 about here-

Implications

Wiersma and Gibney (1985) have noted that historically, the observation of teacher performance has been characterized by "subjectivity and variety" (p. 61). These data suggest that there is good reason for concern over variety, at least. Apparently, extensive classroom experience on the part of

observers, and the use of a uniform instrument are not guarantees that evaluations by two observers will reflect any great measure of uniformity.

That a student teacher's evaluation may not correlate well with an experienced observer's assessment is not a revelation. Perhaps low figures in such instances are to be expected. That cooperating teachers and university supervisors provide such disparate judgements of a student teacher's performance is more problematic. Correlation coefficients for cooperating teachers and university supervisors were typically lower than the coefficient for the cooperating teacher and the student.

The reason for such differences has been the subject of some conjecture. Brophy and Good (1978) suggest that a variety of factors impinge such as the lack of experience and the presence of personal biases among observers. The very complexity of classroom activities likely also is a contributing factor. With a variety of stimuli that one could attend to, different observers may simply opt to see different things. Sergiovanni (1985), however, has suggested a different explanation. He has noted that classroom supervision offers both theoretical and practical perspectives and that these perspectives are often not in harmony. University supervisors, he argues, pursue their task in terms of theoretical constructs which reflect higher education's sensitivity to educational research. In doing so, they may fail to properly appreciate the dynamics of classroom activities. Their theoretical orientation may limit their capacity to accomodate any classroom spontaneity which seems not

to fit the framework. Teachers, on the other hand, operate in a clinical rather than a theoretical mode. The classroom teacher's tendency is to respond to problems as they arise, in a very practical fashion. Problems must be solved now. There is little time to consider theory and theoretical rationale.

There is a cost to the teacher's pragmatism. The classroom teacher develops a distance from theory and may become alienated from the intellectual roots of her/his own profession (Joyce and Clift, 1984). In the present study, the cooperating teacher may be operating in the pragmatic mode, the university supervisor in a theoretical mode, and the student teacher, drawn by the demands of each, somewhere between. As a consequence, correlation figures are low.

If part of the difficulty for the cooperating teacher is indeed a limited theoretical grounding, McNeil and Popham (1977) offer some further explanation. Despite the fact that a primary responsibility for improving teaching skill falls to the teacher her/himself, teachers tend not to be self-directing in their learning and in judging their teaching. Self-direction, say McNeil and Popham, requires a self-assessment and a sensitivity to classroom conditions that many teachers simply do not have. Their training programs often fail to help them develop familiarity with appropriate educational theories and in doing so, deny them the labels and concepts which are the by-products of theory and which are necessary to an analysis of teaching behavior. In the absence of an appropriate theoretical framework, there may be no coherent way to analyze one's own, or

another's teaching behaviors. If supervisory programs do not compensate with specific instruction in classroom observation skills, there is little reason to expect consistent results. Acceptable reliability in the observation of teaching behaviors, note Wiersma and Gibney (1985), is probably preceded by a good deal of practice and direction.

These problems have implications beyond student teaching programs. Graduate study in education, like graduate study in any field, is substantially more theoretical than is undergraduate study. It would seem that the impact of such study on the classroom behavior of the teacher is substantially limited by the clinical/pragmatic orientation of many.

A final concern is the role which observation and supervision have in many educational reform programs. Attempts to tie teacher compensation more closely to performance in the classroom rely significantly on evaluations which a variety of observers make of classroom activity. Without evidence that data reflect greater reliability than those in this study did, decisions affecting faculty which are based heavily on classroom observation appear to have an unstable base.

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Table 1

The Ten Areas of Greatest Difficulty for the Student Teacher

A. The Student Teachers' Perceptions (n = 85)	mean	std. dev.
1. classroom discipline	2.48	.91
2. motivating students	1.99	1.03
3. dealing with slow learners	1.98	1.12
4. the problems of individual students	1.90	.89
5. lack of spare time	1.83	1.09
6. large class size	1.77	1.10
7. dealing with individual differences	1.68	1.09
8. the burden of clerical work	1.67	1.00
9. assessing students' work	1.64	.84
10. inadequate school equipment	1.63	1.10
B. The Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions (n = 85)		
1. classroom discipline	2.15	1.04
2. the problems of individual students	1.52	.69
3. determining students' learning level	1.49	.73
4. planning lessons and school days	1.44	.61
5.5 motivating students	1.41	.70
5.5 dealing with slow learners	1.41	.66
7.5 use of different teaching methods	1.40	.63
7.5 dealing with individual differences	1.40	.56
9. the burden of clerical work	1.35	.62
9. awareness of school policies and rules	1.35	.60
C. The University Supervisors' Perceptions (n = 15)*		
1. classroom discipline	1.57	.79
2. motivating students	1.33	.59
3. the problems of individual students	1.25	.48
4. dealing with slow learners	1.23	.55
5.5 use of different teaching methods	1.20	.41
5.5 organizing classwork	1.20	.51
7. dealing with individual differences	1.19	.39
8. inadequate guidance and support	1.17	.46
9. planning lessons and school days	1.16	.40
10. large class size	1.11	.52

*Note that although there were only 15 university supervisors, separate assessments were submitted for each of the 85 students.

Table 2
Correlations Between Observers

	Coop. Tchr.	Univ. Sup.
1. Classroom Discipline		
Student	.36 (.36)	.26 (.29)
Coop Tchr.		.31 (.25)
2. Motivating Students		
Student	.21 (.22)	.31 (.26)
Coop. Tchr.		.22 (.24)
3. The Problems of Individual Students		
Student	.15 (.21)	.09 (.04)
Coop. Tchr.		.02 (.05)
4. Dealing With Slow Learners		
Student	.20 (.28)	.11 (.06)
Coop. Tchr.		.08 (.16)
5. Dealing With Individual Differences		
Student	.43 (.28)	.17 (.01)
Coop. Tchr.		.40 (.26)

*Note. The first correlation coefficient is the Pearson Product Moment. The nonparametric statistic appears in parentheses.

Appendix

Variables Most Commonly Mentioned as Problem Areas for New Teachers. (Veenman, 1984)

1. classroom discipline
2. motivating students
3. dealing with individual differences
4.5 assessing students' work
4.5 relations with parents
6.5 organization of classwork
6.5 insufficient materials and supplies
8. dealing with problems of individual students
9. heavy teaching load--insufficient preparation time
10. relations with colleagues
11. planning lessons and school days
12. effective use of different teaching methods
13. awareness of school policies and rules
14. determining learning level of students
16. knowledge of subject matter
16. burden of clerical work
16. relations with principals/administrators
18. inadequate school equipment
19. dealing with slow learners
20. dealing with diverse and culturally deprived students
21. effective use of textbooks and curricular guides
22. lack of spare time
23. inadequate guidance and support
24. large class size